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ABSTRACT

In the 1990s, Hong Kong underwent a great deal of education reforms in response to the public's concern for the quality of education. To keep pace with social and economic developments, education policies have had to be reviewed periodically so that necessary modifications could be made. In 1999, the Education Commission was requested to conduct a comprehensive review of the overall education system and required to submit its recommendations. In Hong Kong, the change agenda has increasingly been set by politicians rather than educators. With the centralization of education reform, teachers have seemingly lost control of change. This paper describes how education policies could be adequately implemented at school levels and what necessary conditions should be created for possible school improvement in Hong Kong. The discussion adopts a critical perspective and, in its conclusion, outlines several implications to alert policymakers as well as the "frontier practitioners" as to how this education policy can be successfully implemented. (Contains 54 references.) (DFR)

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To innovate and change: A critique on how education policy is implemented and what necessary conditions for school improvement should be created in Hong Kong

Chow Ping-yan, Alan

(Abstract)

Like other developed countries in the world, Hong Kong has undergone huge amount of education reforms since the last decade as a response to public's concern on the quality of school education. To keep pace with social and economic developments in Hong Kong, education policies have to be periodically reviewed so that necessary modifications can be made (The Board of Education, 1997; The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 1997). In 1999, the Education Commission, on the other hand, was requested by the Government to conduct a comprehensive review of the overall education system in Hong Kong and required to submit their recommendations to the Chief Executive by the middle of 2000 (Education Commission, 1999).

However, in Hong Kong and places elsewhere, the change agenda has increasingly been set by politicians, rather than educationalists. With the centralization of educational reform, teachers have seemingly lost control of change. Ainscow, Hopkins, Southworth & West (1994), having closely worked with frontier teachers in their on-going school improvement work, comment that any change, be it externally or internally inspired, will be successful only to the extent that the school creates the conditions within which change and innovation can flourish.

This paper describes the concern of the writer on how education policies could be adequately implemented at school levels and what necessary conditions should be created for possible school improvement in Hong Kong. A critical perspective looking into matter is adopted in the discussion. To conclude, the writer outlines several implications to alert the policy-makers as well as the frontier practitioners how this education policy can be implemented as a success rather than a mess brought to schools.

1 Introduction

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), like many developed countries in the world, is in the era of innovations and changes as a response to public's concern on the quality of education. At present, the Education Commission (1999a & 1999b) has undergone a comprehensive review of the overall education system and required submitting its recommendations to the HKSAR Government by the middle of 2000. New reforms and changes seemed to have overflowed the frontline schools since the last decade. Nowadays, principals and teachers are busily involved with numerous innovative abbreviations, such as "TOC", "SMI", "SMC", "SBM", "IT", "MOI", "BM", "QEF", "SBCTS", "SBRSP"[1], etc. Even the parents and students are very much confused and exhausted with the above reformed symbols.

Policymakers of Hong Kong formulating these education initiatives might assume a

[1] "TOC" (Target-oriented Curriculum); "SMI" (School Management Initiative); "SMC" (School Management Committee), "SBM" (School-Based Management), "IT" (Information Technology), "MOI" (Medium of Instruction), "BM" (Benchmark), "QEF" (Quality Education Fund), "SBCTS" (School-based Curriculum Tailoring Scheme", "SBRSP" (School-based Remedial Support Programme)

relatively direct relationship between government policy "inputs", local responses, and programme "outputs". The change agenda has increasingly been set by politicians, rather than educationalists. Just as McLaughlin (1990) commented after the Rand Change Agent Study, "Policy of that period generally ignored the contents of what economists called the "black box" of local practices, beliefs, and traditions. The common idea behind these substantively distinct federal programs was that more money or better ideas – enhanced inputs – would enable local educators to improve school practice".

With the centralisation of educational reform, teachers have seemingly lost control of change. Ainscow, Hopkins, Southworth & West (1994), having closely worked with frontier teachers in their on-going school improvement work, comment that any change, be it externally or internally inspired, will be successful only to the extent that the school creates the conditions within which change and innovation can flourish.

As Wittaker (1993) also comments it, successful changes in educational practice tend to come from practitioners themselves rather than through regulation. In other words, the effectiveness of any changes lies on the incentives from the practitioners rather than making them as rigid legislation or regulations. If there is any initiative, whether it is a direct transplantation or originated from the adaptation of western theories, concepts and ideas, which is not well supported by the majority of the people concerned, it will surely lead to a definite failure.

This paper, taking the implementation of "School-based Management (SBM)" movement in Hong Kong schools as an example, describes the concern of the writer on how education policies could be implemented at school levels and what necessary conditions should be created for possible school improvement in Hong Kong. A critical perspective, based on a close review on some local and international studies and literature on SBM, plus the author's study at nine aided primary SBM schools and an on-going research and staff development project with 32 SBM schools, looking into matter is adopted in the discussion. To conclude, the writer outlines several implications to alert the policy-makers as well as the frontier practitioners how this education policy can be implemented as a success rather than a mess brought to schools.

2. A critique on how the education policy of SBM is implemented and what necessary conditions for school improvement should be created in Hong Kong

"School Management Initiative (SMI)" (Education & Manpower Branch (EMB) and Education Department (ED), 1991) or the latter substituted name of "School-based Management (SBM)" (Education Commission, 1997) was first introduced to Hong Kong in March 1991. It echoed the world's trend of school effectiveness and school improvement movement, aiming to enhance quality culture, flexibility, transparency and accountability in all schools of Hong Kong (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), 1998). The initiative started in the fall of 1991 with 21 secondary schools participating in a pilot scheme. In 1998, the number of practising SBM schools has raised up to 365 or approximately 30% of all primary and secondary schools. However, with reference to the 1998 Policy Address, it is recommended that the target will be set to have all schools practising SBM by 2000. In other words, the HKSAR government is expecting that by 2000, about no more than two years time, all

school practitioners can be armed with adequate knowledge and skills and able to implement the new change in their schools.

With reference to the above development schedule, it is noticed that there is a big gap between the target figure of 100% schools by the year 2000 and the up-to-date (1998) figure of 365 which is only approximately 30% of the total number of primary and secondary schools. Before the introduction of EC Report No.7, the government allowed discretion for the school authority either to adopt SBM or remain their status quo. But with the endorsement by the Chief Executive of the HKASR Government, Mr. Tung Chee-hwa, in the 1998 Policy Address in October 1998, SBM is to be in its full implementation in September 2000. A question is: Since it is a "top-down" centralised reform policy that the decision of change does not lie on the hands of the frontier practitioners, how can schools cope with this drastic change in such a short period of no more than two years?

To critique on the issue, the following questions are used as a guideline for reflection: Who initiates the change? What is the reform for? Do practitioners have a choice? Is the innovation convincing? Do we have sufficient evidence of good practices of SBM? What are the main criticisms in relation to the implementation of SBM? What are the possible difficulties in managing the change? What are the conditions needed for the change? What are the implications? How can policy be effectively implemented in schools?

2.1 Who initiates the change?

The initiation of SBM is a government intention to conduct the change. It is an external imposed change without the consensus of the second party. The practitioners at the school level have no authority to choose.

As it is stated by Hopkins, et al (1994),

> External change is much harder to assimilate – it is what others would do to us, to our school...Resistance to sudden alternation in circumstances is natural, even when it would seem to be for the better. (p.21)

Implementation can dominate outcome (McLaughlin, 1990). If the change decision is not fallen onto the shoulder of the participants, resistance is inevitable (Fullan & Miles, 1992). In this sense, the follow-up question will be: "Who will be the best to initiate the change?" Before answering the question, Miles (1986) has also reminded us about the factors that make for successful initiation. Factors include: (1) the innovation should be tied to a local agenda and high profile local needs; (2) a clear, well-structured approach to change should be present; (3) there should be an active advocate or champion who understands the innovation and supports it; (4) there should be active initiation to start the innovation ("top-down" initiation can be acceptable under certain conditions); (5) the innovation should be of good quality.

In sum, the government imposed change by "top-down" initiation. It will only be effective until it can "convince" the people at the school level who are involved to "accept" the new conception. But if we want to make it more effective, it should be the practitioners themselves taking the initiation locally and start the learning journey (Fullan & Miles, 1992).

2.2 What is the reform for?

Fullan and Miles (1992) comment that schools and districts are overloaded with problems. We get glimpses of the power of change, but we have little confidence that we know how to harness forces for continuous improvement. The problem is not really lack of innovation, but the enormous overload of fragmented, uncoordinated, and ephemeral attempts at change. Change will be welcome by schools:

- if the SBM initiative is for the goodness of our students in terms of the quality of their learning outcomes;
- if the SBM reform has its focus to improve the teacher quality which can ultimately lead to learning effectiveness in students;
- if the focus of managing people in SBM is moving further towards securing the means to help all staff learn; or
- if the purpose of SBM presumably is to help schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programmes and/or practices with better ones.

With reference to Townsend, Clarke and Ainscow (1999), they see reform in a way that school effect research should have been used to identify ways to promote achievement for all children. That is, to respond to the question "What is the reform for", the reform of SBM should have its focus on student learning. Change for the change will not help (Fullan, 1991). Some reforms fail because they have been taken as "symbol rather than substance" and there are "faulty maps of change" (Fullan & Miles, 1992). Everyone involved in the reform has a personal map of what the reform should look like and how change can best be proceeded. Policy-makers have their political agenda when they look at reforms. School personnel have their own perception towards the conduction of an external imposed change in their schools. People in the community and parents might have different expectation on the school reforms, too. Therefore, we should look into the SBM issue and make sure that whether the reform can be adequate for its implementation in Hong Kong or meet the following characteristics, adopted from Fullan (1991):

2.2.1 Need – What is the reform for? Is SBM perceived to be the priority need of the schools for school improvement? Whose need is this, the Chief Executive of HKSAR Government, the legislators, politicians, the policy-makers, the ED officials, the school board members, the school principals, teachers, the parents or the students?

2.2.2 Clarity – What is the ultimate goal of the reform? Although the deadline of implementing SBM is clear, the limits, the guidelines, the means, the specifications, and so on, are not yet clear to the implementers. Could the school opt in between alternatives? What are the alternatives? How much authorized power the school could have? All these should be clarified to the participants.

2.2.3 Complexity – How complexity the change will be? Because complexity refers to the difficulties and extent of change required of the individuals responsible for implementation. For example, in the implementation of SBM, it involves a sophisticated array of activities, structures, diagnoses, plans, strategies, and philosophical understanding or paradigm shift in practitioners' conception. Dilemma

might be occurred because on one hand, the larger the scope and personal "demandingness" of the change, the greater chance for success. But on the other, attempting too much can result in massive failure (Fullan, 1991) or "overreaching" (Huberman & Miles, 1984). But in the case of Hong Kong, the introduction of a curriculum reform, Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC), an Information Technology (IT) invasion leading to an IT Education in all schools, together with the initiation of the SBM in the 1990s, complicate the situation. Schools are overloaded with reforms. But all seem concrete and significance. Can schools really activate the "start small, think big" or "focusing on something concrete and important" strategy, as suggested by Fullan (1992), in regarding these constraints?

2.2.4 Quality/practicability – Is SBM appropriate to be implemented at school systems of Hong Kong? What is the quality of the policy change? Dimmock (1998), looking at the reforms in Hong Kong from a cultural perspective, comments that the blue print for school restructuring initiatives has been exported from the West, and imported into the Asian Culture of Hong Kong. He argues that the importation of policy raises important questions about its appropriateness for indigenous cultures. In other words, the quality and practicability of the change is questionable. Indeed, according to Fullan (1991), when we consider whether a plan can be adopted, we have to refer to the three R's of "Relevance, Readiness and Resources", before it can be initiated. SBM is considered to be the remedy for restructuring the school management system of Hong Kong schools (EMB & ED, 1991). If we believe that this self-managing approach of management can help to bring to school effectiveness, then it can be regarded as relevance. But Dimmock tries to argue in his paper that it is rather a "Yes" and/or "No" answer to the question. He also comments that the successful implementation of all three reforms rests heavily on professional development and moral leadership of the principals.

The concern for the relevant characteristics of the change, the needs, the clarity, the complexity and the quality/practicability is, therefore, needed to be considered in formulating the policy for change. Otherwise, SBM will only become a myth, a false truth associated with change but actually it cannot serve its purpose.

2.3 Do practitioners have a choice?

With reference to the relevant documents, school practitioners seem to have no choice but to implement the initiative by September 2000. Schools are given no other alternatives to choose but to stick on to the laid schedule and rules. Under the SBM, the government has set many deadlines for schools to follow. For examples, schools are requested to start writing their school plans commencing in September 1999. They have to start restructuring their school infrastructure and give annual school reports to the Education Department within the 1999-2000 school year, one year before the actual implementation year. People involved are discomfort with the bureaucracy of the government and the rigidity of the external controlled change.

McLaughlin (1990) concludes in her analysis of the "Rand Change Agent" study and states that "the nature, amount, and pace of change at the local level was a product of local factors that were largely beyond the control of higher-level policy-makers". Three implications from her observation confirm that "policy cannot mandate what matters; implementation dominates outcomes; and local variability is the rule,

uniformity is the exception" (p.12-13). For a reflection, if schools are not given the flexibility and authority to carry out reforms, how can the reforms meet the specified needs of the schools concerned? In addition, it is also the case that the most effective school improvement strategies seem to be internal rather than external to the school (Hopkins et al, 1996).

2.4 Is the innovation convincing? Do we have sufficient evidence of good practices of SBM?

The answer is "Yes" and "No". To the author's observation, the evidence listed below can only be regarded as some supporting references provided by some "good-hearted" researchers or "political" policy-makers. The policy of SBM in relation with other education policies in Hong Kong, such as TOC and quality education reveals a remarkable similarity to those introduced in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and many others over the past ten years. SBM, or its early title "SMI", is actually originated from a model of management in Australia called the "Self-managing School" (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988 & 1992), with additional influence from research in the USA. The experience shared from the West with adequate supporting evidence from researches seems to be convincing.

Referring to the government documents, such as the SMI Advisory Committee reports, EC Report No.7, The 1997, 1998 and 1999 Policy Addresses, and all twenty-six SMI Quarterly Bulletins, all give positive evaluation of the scheme. Even if there are criticisms, they will only treat them as minor problems or difficulties that the schools can overcome. Problems identified include, too heavy workload, insufficient professional advice and support from the ED, inadequate pre-service and in-service training for both the principals and the teachers or in-house school-based staff development programmes during the operation of SBM (ED, 1994b; 1996b; Chow, 1999).

But with reference to Dimmock's (1998) analysis, minimal attention is paid to the receptivity of the host culture to the imported policy. Experience from the West could be adequate to the situation of Hong Kong but we have to be careful about its cultural difference.

Apart from this, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) also mention that there is virtually no firm, research-based evidence of either direct or indirect effects of SBM on students. The largest category of obstacles identified in the review was attitudes and beliefs. Other obstacles include concerns about the viability of SBM, the commitments of those involved, worries about funding, and the consequences for one's work. On the other hand, they notice that SBM typically has been promoted as a strategy for increasing the effectiveness of schools. Depending on the form of SBM chosen, the leverage for this increased effectiveness is thought to be more direct accountability of schools to the public, greater administrative discretion in the use of resources, or enhanced utilization of the professional capacities of staff (p.277). Further, at best, they also discover that some form of SBM may provide a suitable structure within which to implement deliberately selected improvements in classroom and school-wide educational practices. At worst, SBM is being used by some districts and governments as a popular symbol of progressive and responsive practice within a public rhetoric of improving student achievement.

Cheng (1999), on the other hand, tries hard to promote the initiative by giving a list of research projects conducted by the task group of evaluation of SMI of the Advisory Committee from 1993 to 1997 to support his claim of the effectiveness and usefulness of SMI. However, the reports he quoted are mainly derived from the Advisory Committee, appointed by the government, which might not be able to reflect the real situation of how SMI is implemented at school level. The committee wrote:

> The findings of the study of good practices and noticeable effects of SMI implementation in some schools revealed that the major components of SMI...can make a contribution to school management and operation, staff's teaching practice and students' learning activities and outcomes
>
> (Task Group of Evaluation of the SMI scheme, 1997)

Apart from the above government studies, Cheng (1999) also lists a number of local empirical research studies in which the factors related to the effectiveness of Hong Kong schools are explored. He concludes in his paper and envisages that numerous good opportunities have been created for policy-makers, school practitioners and educational researchers to conduct educational innovations, school improvements and school effectiveness research.

Pang (1999), another local researcher, having an interest to develop performance indicators for schools in the domain of management, has conducted a survey on managerial practices in Hong Kong primary schools. In his study, Pang notices that out of the 60 primary schools, 12 school were identified with a "strong culture", 25 schools with a "moderate culture", 12 schools with a "weak culture", and 11 schools with a "conflicting culture". As a conclusion, he suggests that if school administrators are to enhance the sharing of organizational values between teachers and the school, to strengthen organizational culture and to build a quality management culture within the school, they should decentralize school management to the teacher level and should emphasize rationality, participation, collaboration, collegiality, goal orientation, communication, consensus, professional orientation and teacher autonomy in the daily operation. In sum, Pang is also in favour of a decentralized management practice in primary school and his study, in certain circumstances, supports the implementation of SBM in Hong Kong schools.

Chow (1999), on the other hand, has also conducted a study on the related topic. It is about an investigation of the effectiveness of the implementation of SBM in 9 primary schools. In his study, it is noticed that the SMI scheme in Hong Kong, compared with the implementation of SBM in places elsewhere, has its own unique characteristics. The findings indicate that the SMI of Hong Kong has been more on the administrative control side. School heads and teachers feel stressful because of heavy workload and pressure caused by the new scheme. Although, workload is more, school participants treasure from working on school plan, shared decision-making and more autonomy in the new scheme. The result of the findings gives implications that effective leadership, collegiality, professional development and healthy interpersonal relations are essential to accelerate the effectiveness of the school management scheme.

As a consequence, although current SBM practices are not that well implemented, some research findings can only give a limited knowledge and evidence in supporting

the possibility and feasibility of promoting SBM in Hong Kong schools. Referring to the fact that only about 30% of schools are now practising SBM in their schools. It still needs a careful planning before all schools are in place. However, if we want to carry reform based on the school needs, we should be aware of providing the necessary conditions, as mentioned above, for schools in the implementation process of SBM, otherwise any good will reform will fail to achieve its goal.

2.5 What are the main criticisms in relation to the implementation of SBM? What are the possible difficulties in managing the change?

With reference to the government documents, such as the SMI Advisory Committee reports, EC Report No.7, The 1997, 1998 and 1999 Policy Addresses, and all twenty-six SMI Quarterly Bulletins, all intend to give positive evaluation of the scheme. Take the SMI Quarterly Bulletins as an example, a teacher wrote in the SMI Quarterly Issue No. 9. and reported that SMI was a learning opportunity for their school and the concept of SMI could meet their school needs (ED, 1994b). A principal also wrote about her feeling towards the implementation of SMI in the same Quarterly Issue. She realized that collegiality could be achieved during the process. She felt touching because she noticed the involvement of teachers and she believed that it could make a difference in their school. Some other principals and teachers, in the following Quarterly Issues (ED, 1994c; 1994d; 1995a), also expressed their impression on the implementation of SMI. Majority of them supported the scheme because they found the existence of shared decision-making in their schools, they could have opportunity to do self reflection, they had also noticed a systematic approach for school management and a clearer school vision and goal, and more flexibility in their school finance system.

Concerning criticisms, they have listed only a few comments in two (ED, 1994c & 1996b) among the twenty-six SMI Quarterly Issues. Some of the criticisms include:

- too much paper work;
- too heavy workload;
- insufficient professional advice and support from the ED;
- uneasy to persuade all the teachers to be involved and committed;
- too many problems to be dealt with;
- inadequate training for both the principals and the teachers or school-based staff development programmes during the operation of SBM .

Cheng (1999), on the other hand, after mentioning the drawbacks and difficulties concerning the first wave of education reform, seems to be pleased with the second wave and mentions no significant criticism related to the issue of SBM. He only concludes at the end and writes: Even though a number of drawbacks and difficulties have inevitably been encountered in policy formulation and implementation, obviously numerous good opportunities have been created for policy-makers, school practitioners and educational researchers to conduct educational innovations, school improvement and school effectiveness research (p.27).

The author, in an ongoing research and staff development activity with 32 primary schools since May 1999, has conducted several group interviews with serving teachers concerned. In the conversation about the difficulties at the initial stage of SBM, the teachers have exchanged their concerns and critiqued on the following:

- they like the idea of SBM and believe that it will cause effectiveness and improvement to the school in the long run;
- they believe training is necessary;
- some heads are very supportive but some are too autocratic;
- they have chance to discuss the school vision and goals but they do not have the authority to make decision;
- it is not their decision to participate in the scheme;
- not all teachers are supporting the change;
- it is difficult to collaborate with those who oppose the scheme;
- they have no autonomy to say "No" to the new scheme;
- they have much more paper work and they do not have sufficient guidelines and instructions from the super-ordinate;
- they notice that not all staff are cooperative;
- they request to have more flexibility and room in deciding the for change progress for their own;
- they want to decide on their own pace and scope of change;
- they do not have sufficient advice and support from the ED;
- they feel that the timeline is too rigid;
- they have used up most of their time in meetings;
- they cannot connect the SBM with effective classroom teaching;
- although majority find the concept good and relevant, some of them have reservation towards the effectiveness of the change;
- they have worries and feel stressful.

In another study with nine SMI schools, the author also notices that practitioners at the school level are more concerned with their workload, their pressure caused by the new change, too many meetings and less time to deal with teaching and affair with students. The details can be referred to Table 1 and 2:

Table 1: Opinions on the Disadvantages of the Practising SMI

Opinions (Question 3)	Sample Schools			Total
	P	*S*	*T*	
More (heavy) workload	*3*	*10*	*16*	*29*
No disadvantages	*3*	*1*	*9*	*13*
More pressure	*0*	*5*	*2*	*7*
Too many meetings	*1*	*3*	*2*	*6*
Less time to prepare lessons	*0*	*3*	*2*	*5*
Less time to help/communicate with pupils	*0*	*0*	*3*	*3*
No practical help in teaching	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*
Lack of related knowledge	*1*	*1*	*0*	*2*
Activities planned without clear aims	*0*	*1*	*1*	*2*
Lack of experience	*1*	*0*	*0*	*1*
The flexibility of trying out plans is decreased	*0*	*1*	*0*	*1*
Parental demand is increased	*0*	*1*	*0*	*1*
Total	*9*	*27*	*37*	*73*

Notes:
'P' denotes principals; 'S' denotes senior teachers, and;'T' denotes ordinary teachers.

Table 2: Opinions on the Influence of the Practising SMI on Individuals

Opinions (Question 4)	Sample Schools			Total
	P	*S*	*T*	
More workload	*1*	*10*	*7*	*18*
Better know the school plans, goals etc.	*0*	*6*	*2*	*8*
School management can be more systematic	*2*	*2*	*3*	*7*
Hard to cope with the great pressure	*1*	*2*	*2*	*5*
Greater participation in decision-making	*1*	*1*	*2*	*4*
Easier to achieve goals	*3*	*0*	*0*	*3*
More freedom	*1*	*1*	*0*	*2*
More time spent on meeting	*0*	*2*	*0*	*2*
Routine work can be evaluated	*1*	*0*	*0*	*1*
Better relationships with colleagues	*1*	*0*	*0*	*1*
Conflicts coming up among colleagues	*0*	*0*	*1*	*1*
Have a sense of satisfaction	*1*	*0*	*0*	*1*
Personal growth can be fostered	*1*	*0*	*0*	*1*
Less self-confidence	*0*	*0*	*1*	*1*
Lower efficiency	*0*	*1*	*0*	*1*
Higher self-expectation	*0*	*1*	*0*	*1*
Have an effective teaching	*0*	*1*	*0*	*1*
Total	*13*	*27*	*18*	*58*

Whatever comments we have with reference to the above findings, they should be taken into careful consideration. For if we do not pay concern to the needs of the practitioners, nor build up a close relationship between principal and teachers, nor give the necessary support to the participants, any wishful thinking reform will still be in vain. Success in school reform efforts is much more likely when problems are treated as natural. Schools that were successful in changing could and did make structural changes in an effort to solve difficult problems (Fullan & Miles, 1992).

2.6 What are the conditions needed for the change? What are the implications?

According to Ainscow et al. (1994), conditions are the internal features of a school and ways of working that enable it to get the work done. When circumstances exist that are less supportive of change, it is necessary in the initial stages to concentrate much more on creating the internal conditions within the school which facilitate development, limiting work on the priorities until the conditions are in place (p.10). Suggested by Ainscow et al., the conditions are: (1) Proper attention to the potential benefits of enquiry and reflection; (2) A commitment to collaborative planning; (3) The involvement of staff, students and the community in school policies and decisions; (4) A commitment to staff development; (5) Effective coordination strategies; (6) Effective leadership, but not just of the head; the leadership function is spread throughout the school (p.13).

In order to make the following discussion more fruitful, the "seven propositions for successful change" suggested by Fullan and Miles (1992) are adopted as a guiding agenda for further reflection.

In Fullan & Mile's suggestion, there are seven basic themes or lessons for successful reform:

2.6.1 Change is learning – loaded with uncertainty.

New meaning and learning requires time to assimilate. Indeed, we can notice from different research studies that participants in the new change will always find a period of difficult time – "the implementation dip". Depression might take place among the staff. People will not venture into uncertainty unless they have understood that difficulties encountered are a part of the process. In addition, understanding successful change as learning also puts ownership in perspective. Perhaps this might be the main reason why many researchers and school practitioners, especially the school heads, would like to promote SBM in their school although they have encountered some unfavourable experiences at their initiation phase. They take change as a learning opportunity.

2.6.2 Change is a journey, not a blue print.

There is basically no single, well-developed proven blue print for any school to follow. Every school is unique and their background, their context, their history as well as their people involved are very different from the other school. They can choose their way of schooling system, school aims and objectives, management system, pedagogy, teaching materials, assessment modes, and many others. In the case of SBM, the government should allow flexibility in them. "Policy does not mandate what matters" (McLaughlin, 1990). Centralized policy can at best set a direction, a framework for action, but it is local implementation that determines student outcomes (Harris & Hopkins, 1999). Schools should be given autonomy to decide their pace as well as their way and their scope of change. To make a school improved, people involved should have time to do it. That is why they need a planned change – "Do, then plan...and do and plan some more", a journey that leads them to change and develop.

2.6.3 Problems are our friends.

School improvement is a problem-rich process. Only by tracking problems can we understand what we need to do next to get what we want. People involved in the change process need time to grow and develop. It is natural to have failure and disappointment especially at the initial stage. In the time of initiation, pressure from within and without the school will exist (Hopkins et al, 1994). And people can learn from problems. Sometimes, there is a need for policy level intervention to ensure that there is the infrastructure for developing and disseminating effective practices. It is advisable for the government to target funding to schools that make the more obvious improvement in the implementation of SBM. But autonomy should be given to them choosing when and how to start their SBM. Awarding the schools with the Quality Education Fund as incentives and encouraging them to do quality initiatives is of value because failure can bring success and the sense of success will in turn lead to more success. Only until then people will learn to self-manage their schools and try whatever methods to solve their problems.

2.6.4 Change is resource-hungry.

The matter can be of three-folded. First, the government should invest a great

amount of money in implementing SBM in schools. Allow schools to create flexibility in school budgeting needs money. Request for additional resources for training needs money. Improve the school facilities also needs money. Secondly, the more important resource is time – the time to carry out reforms, the time to do training, the time to do strategic planning. Success is likely only when the extra energy requirements of change are met through the provision of released time or through a re-designed schedule that includes space for the extra work of change. Lastly, the other resources include educational contents and psychosocial resources are necessary to equip the teachers with relevant knowledge, skills and attitude so that they can be committed, empowered and supported to implement SBM in their schools.

2.6.5 Change requires the power to manage it.

Successful change efforts are most likely when the local district office is closely engaged with the changing school in a collaborative, supportive way and places few bureaucratic restrictions in the path of reform. As a reflection for the policy level, schools need legitimacy and they need to be respected. If the government wants to decentralise power to the schools, the administrators at the policy level should pay respect to the SBM schools and let them decide what, when and how to conduct their changes. At the same time, schools should also decentralise their power to the middle managers, cross-role groups (Fullan & Miles, 1992) or even ordinary teachers to self-manage their own planning and other teaching activities.

2.6.6 Change is systematic.

Reform must focus on the development and interrelationships of all the main components of the system simultaneously – curriculum, teaching and teacher development, community, student support systems, and so on. Reform must focus not just on structure, policy, and regulations but on deeper issues of the culture of the system. In the case of SBM, schools, supported by the government in terms of financial, administrative and technical supports at the system level and having school principals and cross-role group as a supporting system at the school level, it is possible to restructure and re-culture the schools. But systematic reform is complex. It needs time. As a response to the discussion, putting SBM in place by 2000 is a hard job for schools because as we have mentioned before, near to 70% of schools in Hong Kong need to begin this innovation in no more than two years time. Could they have sufficient time to de-freeze (i.e. get prepared) before they can exercise the systematic change?

2.6.7 All large-scale change is implemented locally.

Local implementation by everyday teachers, principals, parents, and students is the only way that change happens. SBM can be a good management strategy that a particular school can decide what direction it should go. But then it has to involve the people within to make their vision exist. In Chow's (1999) previous study, there are pros and cons comments noticed from the serving teachers and principals about the implementation of SBM in their schools. Some examples are:

"Through the practice of SMI, I know more about my principal's leadership style and have more chance to gain recognition from her."
"I have got great pressure while facing those big changes but the problem can be solved by taking more training courses and having more sharing with other principals."
"I feel no pressure by now because the PTA (Parent-teacher Association) has just been established."
"I seldom have communication with the principal."
"There is a distance between the principal and the teachers."

In relation to their relationship with the system level, some senior staff and ordinary teachers suggested that the government should take responsibility for monitoring the implementation process of SMI at school level. Some examples are:

"The government should know if the individual schools can `implement the SMI on a step by step basis'."
"The government should devolve authority to staff of every level."
"The government should help schools build up team spirit before actual implementation."
"Detailed plans should be set out in advance."
"They should assure that the money used by SMI schools are in a proper way."

As a consequence, it is optimistic to see that SBM can be in place in the long run. As long as the school personnel have accepted the change, they will start their SBM with the autonomy given by the system level and develop on their own.

2.7 How can the policy be effectively implemented in schools?

With reference to the discussion above, Fullan & Miles (1992) remind us to be aware of the change process, getting the reform right, what works and what doesn't. Cheng (1999) envisages that by SBM, school can be effective and there is a close relationship between teacher effectiveness, principal effectiveness, and school effectiveness. Pang (1999) comments that if SBM is to be implemented, school administrators should pay attention to the importance of sharing of value among teachers and strengthening the school culture as a whole in order to achieve quality management practices. Chow (1999) refers to his studies, points out that effective leadership, collegiality, professional development and healthy interpersonal relations are essential to accelerate the effectiveness of SBM.

Dimmock (1998), on the other hand, reminds us to watch out for the cultural differences when we conduct a borrowed conception from the West. If we can alert ourselves with these cultural factors and work with people in a place where its culture is of comparatively high "Power Distance", moderate "Collectivism", moderate "Masculinity", low "Uncertainty Avoidance" and extremely "Long-term Orientation", we can expect to have a more positive outcome by working collaboratively with them.

Bearing the implementation of SBM in mind, the school improvement studies

conducted by Hopkins and his colleagues (1994, 1996 & 1997) can shed light to review the conditions for the effective implementation of SBM in Hong Kong. First of all, his belief in school improvement as an approach to educational change rests on the following assumptions: (1) The school is the centre of change; (2) There is a systematic approach to change; (3) The internal conditions of schools area key focus for change; (4) Educational goals are accomplished more effectively; (5) There is a multi-level perspective; (6) Implementation strategies are integrated; (7) There is a drive towards institutionalisation.

And based on the above assumptions, Hopkins and his colleagues (1994) have generated six propositions for successful school improvement. The propositions include: (1) Without a clear focus on the internal conditions of the school, improvement efforts quickly become marginalised; (2) School improvement will not occur unless clear decisions are made about development and maintenance; (3) Successful school improvement involves adapting external change for internal purposes; (4) Educational change should be based principally on the school as a unit, and on the teacher as the pivot in the change process; (5) Data about the school's performance creates the energy for development; (6) Successful school improvement efforts engender a language about teaching and change.

Therefore, during the initiation phase of SBM, the school should develop its clear focus with the consensus among the school participants first. A shared decision making will give rise to ownership and commitment. Then, the second step is to create a systematic plan, an overall school plan plus various subject plans. At the same time, the school needs to set up a maintenance or monitoring system so that quality assurance in management, teaching, budgeting, staffing, etc. can be taken care of. Third, taking the external change to internal purpose that means school should do its own development planning and set priorities for action. If practitioners want their school to be effective, they should not do many targets at a time. Fourth, change should involve all levels of people. People can be motivated to contribute themselves for the good sake of the school. Teachers should be empowered to carry out their plans. Sometimes it is good to let the cadre team to initiate plans and sometimes we should let teachers at the classroom level to exercise their individual plan. Fifth, enquiry and reflection as developmental tools are necessary at this stage. It is valuable to collect feedback and do self-evaluation at adequate interval of time. The data collection process and the "Do, then plan...and do and plan some more" approach (Fullan & Miles, 1992) can be of great importance as an effective strategy for reviewing the progress and impact of school policies and initiatives. Sixth, it is also extremely helpful to have a common understanding or language of an emphasis on specifications of teaching and learning when we introduce SBM in schools. Teachers discussing with each other the nature of teaching strategies, establishing some kind of guidelines for the chosen teaching strategies, agreeing on standards used to assess student progress and mutual observation and partnership teaching in the classroom can help accelerate a healthy atmosphere in the school.

3. Conclusion

SBM has become a political imposed change to schools by the HKSAR Government and it will have its full implementation in September 2000. For some advocates, it could be an opportunity to develop quality school education by a self-managing

model of school management practice in Hong Kong schools. For the administrators at the policy level, it is a good chance to improve the quality delivery of school education and quality assurance will be enhanced. For practitioners, SBM could be a problem-rich change conduced in their schools. It could also be an administrative control mode of school management. However, wishful thinking can be a crisis and at the same time a golden opportunity to bring about school improvement. But it depends on what the value and belief embedded in the individual persons, and what kind of conditions we have provided and prepared for the change. Just as Hopkins et al (1997) conclude in their paper, it states that the ultimate achievement of school improvement is a transformation to the culture of the school. Without a change in the school culture among the people involved, change will be disruptive. The link between school improvement strategies and the culture of the school is of crucial importance. This paper adopts Fullan and Miles' (1992) seven propositions of "What works to get reform right" as a guideline to critique on the policy change of SBM in Hong Kong. In response to suggest what necessary conditions for school improvement should be created and how policy can be effectively implemented in schools, Hopkins et al's (1994, 1996 & 1997) propositions for "Successful school improvement" are taken as major reference. In helping the author to reflect on the issue, several questions have been addressed and they should be taken for careful consideration when conducting a policy change. The questions are:

- Who initiates the change?
- What is the reform for?
- Do practitioners have a choice?
- Is the innovation convincing? Do we have sufficient evidence of good practices of SBM?
- What are the main criticisms in relation to the implementation of SBM? What are the possible difficulties in managing the change?
- What are the conditions needed for the change? What are the implications?
- How can the policy be effectively implemented in schools?

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